CLAIMS:

1. A method for packaging a product in a hermetically sealed container having a cup-shaped rigid or semi-rigid body **106** with a rim **107** fitted with a closure **200**, the method comprising:

(a) introducing the product into said cup-like shaped body **106**;

(b) forming an isolated space **204** with a gas inlet **134** and a gas outlet **112**, the space **204** defined between said body **106** and a closure-forming member **200** adjacent to and with a clearance from said rim **107**;

(c) introducing a replacement gas through said inlet **134** to replace at least a substantial portion of gas originally contained in said isolated space **204**; and

(d) displacing at least one of said body **106** or said closure-forming member **200** towards the other of the two members to close said clearance and to attach the closure-forming member to said rim **107**, and hermetically attaching the two to one another to form a gas-tight steel. seal

2. A method according to Claim 1, wherein said product is a pasty material.

3. A method according to Claim 1 or 2, wherein said product is a food product.

4. A method according to Claim 1, wherein the closure-forming member is a film.

5. A method according to Claim 1, wherein the gas outlet is formed by bores **211** leading from the isolated space **204** to the external atmosphere.

6. A method according to Claim 1, wherein the gas outlets are bores **312** in gas communication with a vacuum source **604**.

7. An apparatus for forming a hermetically sealed product-containing container, the container having an essentially cup-like shaped body **106** with rims **107** fitted with a closure **200**; the product not filling the entire container leaving residual space **204** therein; the apparatus comprising:

- a holder 104 for holding said container body 106;
- a spacer member 130 sealingly engageable with said holder 104 and with a closure-forming member 200 and having an opening 132 in a state of seal engagement of said spacer member 130 with said holder 104 and said closure-forming member 200, said opening 132, said container body 106 and said closure-forming member 200, define together an isolated space 204;
- a gas inlet 134 and a gas outlet 112 for introducing a replacement gas into said isolated space 204, and exhausting gas therefrom, respectively; and
- a sealing mechanism comprising a displacing arrangement for displacing one or both of said container body 106 and said closure-forming member 200 towards one another and attaching them to one another in a gas-tight fashion.

8. An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said holder 104 has an opening 108 for receiving the body 106 of the container.

9. An apparatus according to Claim 8, wherein the opening 108 of the holder 104 is fitted with an axially projecting skirt 110 for engagement with the rim 107 of the container 106.

10. An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein the holder 104 is provided with bores 112, serving as gas outlets.

11. An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said spacer member 130 has gas inlet nozzles 134 formed so they open into said opening 132 for introducing a replacement gas into a sealed space.

12. An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said sealing mechanism displaces said closure forming member 200 to sealingly engage said rim 107, through the opening 132 of said spacer member 130.

AMENDED SHEET

ART 34 AMDT

13. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said closure forming member is a heat weldable film ~~200~~. said container body 106 is made of a plastic material, and the engagement of the film to the container body's rim is by means of heat welding.

14. An apparatus according to Claim 13, comprising a trimming member 180 for trimming edges of the film 200 after the heat welding.

15. An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said gas outlet is connected to a vacuum source ~~606~~.

16. An apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the trimming member 180 and a heat sealing plate 160 of the sealing mechanism are axially displaceable through an opening in the spacer member 130.